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Healthy kids: Making school health policy a participatory learning process

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Introduction:

Research has suggested various school health policy models aimed at promoting children's health through policy processes. The models present some overall phases in the process, but also different barriers calling for more in-depth qualitative studies (1). With education as the school's prime objective, barriers potentially prevail if models do not consider the existing structures of the school. As part of the on-going project - Healthy Kids -, this presentation introduces a school health policy model, developed as an 'add-in' to the school curriculum and organisational practices.

Methods

The presented model works at two levels - the classroom and the organizational level – and is based on four phases, namely: Investigation – Vision – Action – Change, viewed as an iterative process. Pupil perspectives and learning is the basis in all four phases based on a set of health education programmes. Simultaneously a staff health team is formed from existing organisational structures, integrating local knowledge and building support for school policy making based on the pupils' visions. A pilot study - applying the model in one Danish elementary school - has been conducted as an action research process, combined with interviews and participatory observation with teachers, school nurses, and the pupils, with the purpose of exploring the applicability and value of the model. Hereafter the model will be tested at four intervention schools based on qualitative studies.

Results

Pupils enjoyed having a voice in school matters and to deal with real life during health education. Teachers were very positive towards the integration of school health policy work into teaching the curriculum in Danish, Maths and Biology. However, the transferring from the classroom to the organizational levels was weak hindering sustainable health changes.

Conclusion

Findings indicate that integrating school policy processes into the teaching of curriculum might pave the way for schools to engage in health promotion. But further knowledge on how to likewise engage the staff on an organisational level is needed.

1. Denman S, Moon A, Parsons C, Stears D. The Health Promoting School - Policy, Reserach and Practise. London: Routledge Falmer; 2002.